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SIPDIS

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OES/STC (PBATES); OES/IHA (DSINGER AND NCOMELLA)
BANGKOK FOR RMO, CDC, USAID/RDM/A (MFRIEDMAN)
USDA FOR FAS/PASS TO APHIS
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR OSD/ISA/AP (LSTERN)
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SUBJECT: VIETNAM: AVIAN INFLUENZA WEEKLY REPORT FOR NOVEMBER
10, 2005

REF: A) Hanoi 2293; B) Hanoi 3000; C) Hanoi 2991

1. (U) Summary. There has been one new confirmed AI human fatality in Vietnam since Hanoi's last reporting on November 13. This death on October 29 is Vietnam's 42nd from AI. The first phase of the nationwide poultry vaccination campaign has been completed in 50 of 64 provinces in Vietnam, but it is likely that vaccination programs could continue until 2008. The Government of Vietnam has also temporarily banned all imports of live poultry and birds and their unprocessed (uncooked) products. Recent AI outbreaks among poultry in Bac Giang Province and the first human death in three months may signal the beginning of this winter's AI season. End Summary.

ONE NEW HUMAN AI FATALITY

2. (U) Vietnam confirmed its 42nd human death from AI on November 8, its first in three months. The 35 year-old man died on October 29, 2005 after being admitted to a Hanoi hospital four days after his family bought a prepared chicken from a market near his house in the Dong Da District of Hanoi. There is still no clear indication, however, whether he died from eating infected chicken or was exposed to infected poultry. Members of his family did not show any AI symptoms.

PREVIOUS AI SUSPECT CASES

3. (U) Post followed up with the World Health Organization-Vietnam (WHO) on three reported hospitalized cases of severe respiratory illnesses in Quanh Binh Province that occurred at the end of October 2005. None of the cases were related nor lived in the same location. A 14 year old girl and 26 year old man were admitted to the hospital with acute respiratory infections but initially were not suspected as AI (reftel A). Both individuals died but no samples for laboratory diagnosis were obtained from either of these cases.

4. (U) A third suspected case of AI was admitted to Hue University Hospital and survived. Samples from the 27 year old man were taken for analysis, but results are still pending. All three cases are still under investigation by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and WHO. The WHO asked MOH's Department of Preventive Medicine to check close contacts of all three cases and as of November 9, none of the contacts have become symptomatic.

5. (U) Pasteur Institute's Department of Microbiology and Immunology Director and Head of the Laboratory of Enteric and Respiratory Viruses Dr. Phan Van Tu informed the Consul General (CG) in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) on November 4 that if the suspected AI cases in northern Vietnam were confirmed, such confirmation would imply that the AI season is beginning a month earlier than last year. Dr. Tu is the official responsible in southern Vietnam for testing suspected samples for avian flu in humans. However, others note that there were suspected occurring as early as September 2003. At that time, the relationship of the disease to poultry was not well-recognized. In addition, we note that isolated AI cases have also occurred sporadically across Vietnam this summer as well.

TAMIFLU FOR VIETNAM?

6. (SBU) The press has reported in the last two weeks that the Government of Vietnam (GVN) has been negotiating with Roche to produce Tamiflu. According to a November 8 Tuoi Tre Daily article, Roche "officially agreed to grant a sub-license of manufacturing the antiviral drug to Vietnam's Public Health Ministry" and the firm also pledged that

production in Vietnam would begin in two months. Post has not been able to verify this information with MOH.

17. (SBU) On November 8, Minister of Health Tran Thi Chung Chien told the Ambassador that there is no firm agreement with Roche. She asked for U.S. assistance in persuading Roche to give Vietnam a license to produce Tamiflu, noting that Vietnam was prepared to resort to compulsory licensing unless Roche agreed. The Minister also asked for U.S. help in finding a company to work with Vietnam to produce a human vaccine against AI and promised that Vietnam's National Preparedness Plan would be published within a week (reftel B).

VIETNAM STEPS UP GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

18. (U) According to news reports on October 9, the MOH has introduced number of drastic measures to contain an AI outbreak. MOH has ordered hospitals to begin preparing for the possibility of admitting AI victims and to set up temporary hospitals, if needed. The MOH will also work with the military and police forces to contain an AI outbreak and Vietnam News reported that "local government agencies have intensified quarantine activities at border gates and border districts, and have plans to isolate, monitor and provide timely medical treatment to people suspected of having contracted the H5N1 virus."

VIETNAM BANS POULTRY PRODUCTS

19. (U) The Prime Minister signed a resolution November 4 for the control of AI that among other measures puts a temporary ban on all imports of live poultry and birds and their unprocessed (uncooked) products (reftel C). The Embassy was told the resolution is effective immediately although it has still not been published in the media. Although labeled temporary, no end-date was given for the ban. There is no scientific basis for a ban of this sort from all countries whether they have AI or not. A letter from Ambassador Marine to Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Cao Duc Phat in anticipation of the ban noted this and expressed the Embassy's concern.

110. (U) USDA/APHIS veterinarian Dr. Cheryl Hall arrived in Vietnam this week for a two-month TDY. She is working directly with the Department of Animal Health on evaluating Vietnam's vaccination program and establishing a post-vaccination surveillance program. Dr. Hall's visit should improve communication channels and direct cooperation on AI.

111. (U) The first phase of the nationwide poultry vaccination campaign targeting high risk bird populations has been completed in 50 of 64 provinces in Vietnam but it now appears that the vaccination program could continue until 2008. The goal is to build up the program until it reaches a point where enough of the poultry population is continuously vaccinated that the virus can no longer sustain itself. At that point, the program could be ended if effective measures to prevent reintroduction from wild birds were in place.

112. (U) The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) confirmed that AI cases in poultry have been detected in six provinces, including Hanoi, Bac Giang, Thanh Hoa, Quang Nam, Dong Thap and Bac Lieu. Press reports note that between October 25-30, 3,000 ducks died in Bac Giang Province due to AI. On November 10, there were reports of an AI poultry outbreak in Hai Duong Province, but we have not been able to confirm this report with MARD.

113. (U) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Program Officer Fabio Friscia told the HCMC CG that he felt that the current outbreak coincided "more or less" with the timing of last year's AI outbreak in poultry. (Note: FAS and FAO comments about AI outbreaks in poultry, along with confirmation of the AI death of the individual in northern Vietnam and the Pasteur Institutes comments, implies that we may be able to consider -- if not now, then soon -- that this winter's AI season in Vietnam has already begun for poultry (and possibly for humans.) End Note).

OTHER NEWS

114. (U) European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection Markos Kyprianou was in Vietnam for a three day visit this week and announced that the EU was planning to grant 30 million euros to avian flu-affected countries in Asia, including Vietnam as one of the major recipients. The fund would be used for long-term AI plans.

EMBASSY AI PREPAREDNESS

115. (SBU) Post requested and received approval for a

\$250,000 increase to Post's Class B Cashier's advance to be used during a major/significant AI pandemic crisis. The U.S. Consulate General in HCMC is in the process of determining how much of an increase to their Cashier's advance they would need in a worst-case AI pandemic crisis.

WHAT, NO CHICKEN ON THE MENU?

16. (U) An informal telephone survey of ten Hanoi restaurants has revealed that chicken is no longer available on most restaurant menus. Six out of ten restaurants contacted on November 9 said that chicken was not available due to the "chicken flu" or because it was no longer available in the market. One restaurant said that duck was available and assured us that it was from France. We will do a survey next week on whether omelets and fried eggs are still available for breakfast in Hanoi restaurants.

MARINE